

CHAPTER V

THE UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

Talking about Baldwin's Another Country Mailer remarks that "Baldwin understands the existential abyss of love. In a world of Negroes and whites, nuclear fallout, marijuana, bennies, inversion, insomnia, and tapering off with beer at four in the morning, one no longer just falls in love--one has to take a brave leap over the wall of one's impacted rage and cowardice. And nobody makes it, not quite. . . . They cannot find the juice to break out of their hatred into the other country of love."¹

"And nobody makes it, not quite" seems to be the refrain of the novels under discussion as far as love is concerned. Mailer, Malamud and Roth--like many of their contemporaries--are painfully aware of the fact that it is very difficult, almost impossible to achieve enduring love relationships in a transitional age as ours is. The modern technological civilization and the hankering after material success it has brought in its wake are not very conducive to the growth of love. Technology encourages attachment to objects at the expense of personal relationships. Modern gadgets and machines

give all kinds of comforts and amenities to man; at the same time they, apparently at least, make no demands upon him. Whereas human beings often make demands upon a person. They can also be quite unpredictable and irritating. It is, therefore, much easier to depend on inanimate things than on people.

This dependence of the modern man on commodities also breeds in him the tendency to treat human beings like objects. This is quite obvious in the case of most of the protagonists we are dealing with who treat the woman as a sexual object, expect her to be passive and submissive, and try to get rid of her when their need of her is over. Few men are prepared to spend their time and energies on such a slippery ground as love is and so they sacrifice love at the sight of the first obstacle or least discomfort. They would rather give up love than their other goals and ambitions in life as is obvious in the case of Lesser of The Tenants who, though he craves for love, cannot place it above his book on love. "Could it be," says Erich Fromm, "that only those things are considered worthy of being learned with which one can earn money or prestige, and that love, which 'only' profits the soul, but is profitless in the modern sense, is a luxury we have no right to spend much energy on?"²

Another important factor, besides the worship of objects or material success, that has led to the devaluation of love is the liberation of sex from the restraints and taboos that had been imposed on it throughout the ages. This freedom in sexual matters, it was thought, would help man to realize a

fuller and richer ideal of love in his life. In actual practice it has divested love of the romantic halo and mystery that had surrounded it all along and has made it a cheap matter. Joseph Wood Krutch observes that "Rationalism having destroyed the taboos which surrounded it, and physiology having rudely investigated its phenomena upon the same level as other biological processes, it has been stripped of the mystical penumbra in whose shadow its transcendental value seemed real, though hid; and somehow, in the course of the very process of winning the right to love, love itself has been deprived of its value."³ Freedom in sex has also created an atmosphere of cynicism and scepticism with regard to love and while the fleshly aspect of love is given undue importance, its emotional dimension is often treated as silly romantic fiction. Since the days of Freud, moreover, there is a tendency to interpret all human phenomena in sexual terms and so regard love as nothing but some repressed or sublimated form of the sexual urge. However, it is wrong to assume that love, since it is closely connected with libido, is nothing but sex. As Charles I. Glicksberg remarks, "Love is not to be confused with the sexual instinct, which can function without it. Love exists because people believe in it. It is specifically a human sentiment, a vital fiction, a creative effort, as D.H. Lawrence maintained, on the part of man to transcend the boundaries of the self. The act of love is fundamentally an expression of spirit. The sexual instinct does not exist in a 'pure' form, as an absolute."⁴ In his preoccupation with sex modern man often forgets that the deepest

need of man is to relate himself to another person and sexual union is only one expression of man's attempt to transcend the prison of his loneliness. There is also the fact that the suppression of the emotional or spiritual aspect of love often leads to neurosis.

According to Rollo May there are four kinds of love in Western tradition. One is sex or what we call lust, libido. The second is eros, the drive of love to procreate or create--the urge, as the Greeks put it, towards higher forms of being and relationship. A third is philia or friendship, brotherly love. The fourth is agape or caritas as the Latins called it, the love which is devoted to the welfare of the other, the prototype of which is the love of God for man. Every human experience of authentic love, says he, is a blending in varying proportions, of these four. And then he goes on to observe that "It is only in the contemporary age that we have succeeded, on a fairly broad scale, in singling out sex for our chief concern and have required it to carry the weight of all four forms of love."⁵ This overemphasis on the physical aspect of love, at the expense of its other aspects deprives the love experience of its richness and variety. It also makes what is a uniquely personal experience an impersonal one. In the world of today where people are out to grab as much pleasure as possible, and that too in a short time, they have no time and patience to cultivate other forms of love which require effort and commitment on one's part. Short-order sex, therefore, comes

in handy for such people. The tendency is to treat another person more as an instrument to one's pleasure than as a person in his or her own right. This is evident in the fiction under consideration where woman is often treated as a sex object that satisfies certain needs and hungers of man. It also explains, to a certain extent, her distant and distorted picture. Whereas the courtly or romantic love was apt to idealize woman and depict her as an angel of grace that inspired man to achieve moral and spiritual perfection, the image of woman that is presented in the sex-saturated novels of the day is that of a dangerous enemy, who is hostile to the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of man. The current image of a destructive woman in literature thus is a sad commentary on the devaluation of the emotional and spiritual side of love in recent times.

Man-Woman relationship reduced to a sexual equation does not allow for communication on any save the physical level. This, in turn, prevents people from coming to a better understanding and appreciation of the other person just as it also encourages momentary and fleeting connections leaving the persons concerned as isolated as ever. Erich Fromm points out that "If the desire for physical union is not stimulated by love, if erotic love is not also brotherly love, it never leads to union in more than an orgiastic, transitory sense. Sexual attraction creates, for the moment, the illusion of union, yet without love this 'union' leaves strangers as far apart as they were before--sometimes it makes them ashamed of each other, or even

makes them hate each other, because when the illusion has gone they feel their estrangement even more markedly than before."⁶ The truth of these remarks is borne out by most of the leading male characters in the novels we are dealing with. Rarely do they make an attempt to come to an understanding of the woman or see the reality of her. That is why women filtered through their consciousness remain strange and remote figures. After having slept with his sweetheart most of the summer, Neil Klugman of Goodbye, Columbus still asks himself, "How would I ever come to know her, I wondered, for as she slept I felt I knew no more of her than what I could see in a photograph."⁷ Moreover, the satiety and revulsion that is felt after the sexual act, when it is not accompanied by the tender feeling of love, is often turned on the woman and gets amply reflected in her destructive image.

This also brings us to the much discussed theme of alienation. It has been the contention of this thesis that the isolation or alienation suffered by the male protagonists of these novels is largely of their own making--the result of their self-centred natures, their obsession with freedom, sexual as well as individual, their reluctance to assume responsibility for another person or commit themselves to another person. They are apprehensive of personal relationships as these, they think, may come in the way of their personal goals or intellectual pursuits. In connection with Bellow's writings Chirantan Kulshrestha remarks that "Bellow is particularly

hostile to the devaluation of the 'separate self' in modern literature, and he values individuality nearly as high as did Emerson. Yet in novel after novel he is forced to discard individuality, not simply because the individual is insignificant in the face of terrible forces, but also because individuality is undesirable, a burden which keeps the human being from love."⁸ The unbridled ego of the protagonist often comes in the way of his realizing love with another person. Also, great as is his need or yearning for love--to be loved--his love for the other person, in most cases, is narcissistic or infantile. "The controlling aim of the acquisitive desire," says Robert G. Hazo, "is to get what the self wants or needs. The controlling aim of benevolent desire is to give to another what he may want or need."⁹ For the majority of the heroes love remains an acquisitive desire. Very few heroes come to see the benevolent aspect of love or the mature form of love known as agape or caritas.

The trouble with the typical hero of these novels is that he wants love without being in any way inconvenienced by it or hurt by it; he wants the pleasure of it without the pain and conflict that invariably go with the experience of true love. "He has always been concerned with love," says Lesser of his hero in The Tenants, "and has often felt it for one or another person but not generously, fluently, nor has he been able to sustain it long. It's the old giving business, he can and he

can't, not good enough, too many unknown reservations, the self occluded. Love up to a point is no love at all."¹⁰ When it comes to a choice between love and freedom, most of the heroes would rather sacrifice love than their other interests and possibilities, as Lesser sacrifices love for the sake of his book. When love involves pain and conflict, the hero either withdraws into his own shell or goes in search of love with another person. But love also requires fidelity. And as Denis de Rougemont remarks, "Fidelity demands far more: it wants the good of the beloved, and when it acts in behalf of that good it is creating in its own presence the neighbour. And it is by this roundabout way through the other that the self rises into being a person--beyond its own happiness. . . . What denies both the individual and his natural egotism is what constructs a person."¹¹ Though highly concerned about their identity, very few heroes realize that the way to self-realization lies through self-transcendence.

Philip Roth's Letting Go, Norman Mailer's The Deer Park and Bernard Malamud's The Assistant have been selected for discussion in this chapter as these works help to throw some light on the problems of love and commitment. They also bring out the conflict between the redemptive values of love and responsibility on the one hand and the American dream of personal freedom and happiness. It is the pursuit of the American dream that comes in the way of personal relationships

and is often responsible for a person's loneliness and alienation. The protagonists who transcend the prison of self and define their identity satisfactorily, do it by sacrificing the American dream and by accepting their relation and responsibility to the woman and the people around them.

Letting Go, says Scott Donaldson, "combines a Jamesian emphasis on psychological realism . . . with a Dreiserian concentration on environmental forces. It deals at once with internal depths and external surfaces." According to him, the theme of Letting Go is the confrontation of the self by itself and by the world as it is.¹² The lesson that Roth wants his characters to learn is stated in the first epigraph to the novel which is taken from Thomas Mann: "All actuality is deadly earnest; and it is morality itself that, one with life, forbids us to be true to the guileless unrealism of our youth."¹³ The main characters of the novel learn this bitter truth with varying degrees of success.

The person who fails most at learning this truth is Gabe Wallach, the male protagonist of the novel. Gabe is constantly repelled by the world he inhabits as it is not only ugly, but also savage from which all decorum has been drained. Born in a wealthy family, Gabe is the son of a powerful mother and a weak father. Gabe's sensibility is nurtured by his mother's example

and on the study of Henry James in whom he has specialized. Anything that smacks of indecency creates a horror in him. Like his mother, he likes to do the decent thing and arrange people's lives for them. At the same time he has also inherited some of his father's weaknesses. He is "very nervous and indecisive."¹⁴ Lacking the complete self-control of his mother, he faces life uncertainly. "He has the malaise of many wealthy but ordinary young men: he does not exactly know what to do with himself."¹⁵ He is also averse to taking risks: "Suppose happiness should twitch her but and dance merrily off the side of a cliff--should he follow?"¹⁶

This is particularly true of Gabe's personal relationships with the people who are near and dear to him. He shies away from the ties which either turn out to be demanding or risky. After his mother's death, in his great sorrow his father turns to Gabe for comfort. Gabe fails miserably to help out his father at this most trying period of the old man's life. His father's overwhelming and unrestrained sorrow over the loss of his wife and his open dependence on the affection of Gabe scare Gabe away from him. Instead of trying to console his father in his great need he runs away, first, to Iowa for his studies and later, too, maintains a safe distance between himself and the old man by taking up a university job in Chicago instead of in New York. If Dr. Wallach wants to get through to his son, he can do so only, Gabe tells him, "by making decent demands."¹⁷

Gabe is afraid of his life being engulfed by a messy life like his father's. Gabe has also a kind of fear and distrust of emotions and attachments. Though he loves the old man he cannot bear to stay with him. "It was beginning to seem that toward those for whom I felt no strong sentiment, I gravitated; where sentiment existed, I ran."¹⁸ Gabe leaves his father without a hope of filial companionship and the poor old man in his loneliness is compelled to marry a woman for whom he otherwise would not have cared.

Gabe keeps on drifting emotionally and intellectually, afraid to commit himself to anyone or anything. His intellectual drift is evident in his attitude to his teaching job and his colleagues. He does not need his job like the rest of his colleagues because he is alone in the world and economically self-sufficient while they depend upon their pay cheques for their bread. He teaches, as he himself admits, out of neither spiritual nor financial urgency. He is not impelled, as S. Levin of A New Life is, by the strongest urge to teach his students what humanism means and the importance of ideas and values in human life. It is Paul Herz, another male protagonist of the novel, and one who depends on his job for his daily bread, who has the ideals and the moral courage of Levin to come out and take up a position against the department head, John Spigliano. When Spigliano remarks, "We're not educating their souls," Paul asks, "Why not?"¹⁹ Like Levin, Paul risks his job by openly confronting the department head.

Gabe Wallach, who can afford to lose the job, on the other hand, does nothing except treat John Spigliano as a fool and the department meetings as a big joke. He has a low opinion of his colleagues and though he calls teaching a noble profession, he is not the one who will lift his finger and do something to put it back to its former glory. Like Levin's, as Helen Weinberg points out, Gabe's story is set in an academic atmosphere, but the university is urban (Chicago) and serves more as a background than as an opposing force in the foreground as Cascadia College does in A New Life. The university environment in Letting Go, therefore, emphasizes the intellectual drift of the hero.²⁰

Gabe's attitude seems to be that things are beyond redemption. The most sensible thing to do, according to him, is to ignore John Spigliano and do your job. But, suppose, Libby says, you have principles. Still ignore him, Gabe advises. Gabe is not going to be rash like Leo Duffy in A New Life and ruin his life nor is he going to put his career in jeopardy for the sake of principles like Levin. Gabe Wallach defends his passive attitude to his profession by convincing himself that it is not after all his real life. His real life, his real self, is elsewhere.

"But in the end I knew it was not from my students or my colleagues or my publications, but from my private life, my secret life, that I would extract whatever joy--or whatever misery--was going to be mine."²¹

Gabe's private life, however, is not any richer than his professional life. He does not possess the inner resources or

strength of his mother who never needed anyone or at least never gave the impression of needing anyone. Gabe cannot live with his bare self alone. He is weak in the face of loneliness and seeks company from time to time. Like most of the heroes of the Jewish authors, he easily gives in to physical desire. In his need, he takes to bed Marjorie Howells, a sweet empty-headed girl, a young Gentile who is in revolt against Kenosha, Wisconsin. When he gets tired of her, he casually kicks her out, totally distraught. As Martha Reganhart rightly points out, aside from physical desire, he is a perfectly prudent man. He at times is quite indifferent to people's suffering: "If Marge Howells wanted to run, let her run! If my father wanted to pine, let him pine! If Libby Herz wanted to weep, let her weep!"²²

Gabe's emotional drift is particularly apparent in his relationship with the two women who play a prominent role in his life. Libby Herz and Martha Reganhart, the two female protagonists of the novel, are almost as central to the story as the male protagonists--a rare thing in American Jewish Fiction. Roth has even devoted a separate section to each of the women to follow their thoughts and actions. Of course, they are not in the least idealized and there are even many unpalatable things about them. But they come out as "human" figures. They, in a way, represent the reality the hero must come to terms with, as on one occasion Paul thinks of Libby as "the circumstance" of his life. However, the two women themselves are as much the

victims of the circumstances as the two men are.

Libby Herz and Martha Reganhart pay the penalty for following the heart regardless of the practical necessities of life. Libby, who comes from a well-to-do Catholic family, marries Paul Herz, a poor Jewish graduate student. Neither family is prepared to forgive their children for entering into this marriage of mixed religions, even though Libby converts herself to Judaism. Libby, who has come to marriage with the romantic expectations of any average girl, has to face, one after the other, the bitter realities of life--she has to undergo an abortion as they are too poor to afford a child, Paul has to sell his car, her own education is interrupted off and on because of financial pressures and her own ill-health, and on top of it all she contracts kidney trouble. Libby, a self-pitying woman, cannot, try as hard as she might, get used to poverty and want. When Gabe Wallach, therefore, comes into her life she almost looks to him as her saviour, who will rescue her from her intolerable marriage and fulfil her romantic expectations about life.

Gabe Wallach, however, drifts emotionally, unable to commit himself to Libby and yet unable to break off with her completely. He kisses her one night and then pretends that it meant nothing. In his indecision and guilt, he keeps interfering in the life of the Herzes, creating many embarrassing moments for himself and the Herzes as well. He tries to lean

lend

his car to Paul when Paul has to sell his own car. However, Paul sees through Gabe's motives and so refuses the offer. Later on Gabe arranges the adoption of a baby for the Herzes. He makes a mess of the whole business and almost brings the Herzes to the brink of disaster. Instead of offering himself or his love to Libby he keeps on meddling in her life, causing great misery to himself and her.

In Libby's case, Gabe has at least the excuse that she is the wife of another man, who is, first, his class-mate and later, his colleague. Martha Reganhart, a divorcee with two children, presents no such moral dilemma. Even after the bitter experience of her first marriage, Martha is still an incorrigible romanticist: "No, there was only one bag to put your marbles in, one basket for your eggs, and that was love. Nobody was going to marry her for her breasts, her troubles, or her kids. Nor was she going to miss the mark herself. This time she would do it for love."²³ At the beginning of their relationship she assures Gabe, "I don't need a husband, sweetheart--just a lover, Gabe, just someone to plain and simple love me."²⁴ This kind of arrangement is fine for Gabe, as what he really desires is the gratification of the flesh without any ties or obligations. Even while enjoying Martha's hospitality and care in his sickness and believing himself to be in love with her, he is by no means in love with her predicament: "Her life was complicated in ways that would not uncomplicate themselves by a mere lapse of time. There were these two small children to consider; loving her,

must I not love them too? Was I up to it? Did I really want to?"²⁵

Besides the kids and her financial troubles, there are quite a few unpleasant facts about Martha. Like Libby, she is shown to be a poor housekeeper. She is overweight and sometimes shows a very poor taste in her clothes. Immediately after his illness, Gabe leaves Martha on the excuse of the messy medicine cabinet that he discovers in her bathroom. However, not knowing what to do with himself, he returns to her a few days later, but whenever her troubled life threatens to engulf his, he beats a hasty retreat. "What he wants to do," write Irving and Harriet Deer about Gabe Wallach, "is to find some way of being, in Matthew Arnold's sense of the term, 'disinterested'--some way of building on experience, of learning from it without being hurt by it, some way of attaining a balance between love and distance."²⁶ But this is precisely the trouble with the modern sophisticate, that he wants love without being inconvenienced by it, without being hurt by it; he wants the pleasure of it without the pain that invariably goes with true love. Moreover, Gabe Wallach is also afraid of the confrontations, of the moral choice, which one cannot avoid in life. He is unable to face the realities and responsibilities of life. "The same impulse that had led him to want to tidy up certain messy lives had led him also to turn his back upon others that threatened to engulf his own. He had finally come to recognize in himself a certain dread of the savageness of life."²⁷

Martha is only fooling herself when she believes she can just have love without marriage. At bottom she wants Gabe to take the responsibility of herself and her children. But it is not in Gabe's nature to take upon himself the troubles of other people. He always keeps his bags ready to leave Martha at the slightest excuse which makes Martha comment bitterly: "I'll tell you something about feelings, my friend--nobody's got any any more. All they've got is suitcases!"²⁸ Believing the children to be in the way of their marriage, she finally gives them up to her, now successful, ex-husband and his second wife. But even then Gabe does not make the commitment of marriage. Instead of getting Gabe she loses her son, Markie, who dies in an accident, while staying at his father's place. This bitter and tragic experience teaches Martha to give up her dreams of love and make a compromise with the realities of life. Like Libby, Martha gets disappointed and disillusioned in Gabe and learns the lesson implied in the second epigraph of the novel which is taken from Simone Weil: "Men owe us what we imagine they will give us. We must forgive them this debt."²⁹

Gabe's fear of getting involved in relationships which might turn out to be demanding, complex or full of pain and suffering, makes him hurt the people around him. He cannot commit himself to them, ^{but} he cannot leave them alone either. He keeps on interfering in their lives, causing great pain to them and himself. And this "playing safe" does him more damage in the end than grappling with people and difficult situations

would have done. After failing Martha and feeling guilty for the death of Markie, Gabe begins to crack up. In the hour of crisis, when he is trying to save the Herzes' baby for them, the protective covering that he had built up around himself gives way and Gabe suffers a complete break-down. He finally retires to Europe, leaving his job, his father and his friends behind. At the end of the novel Gabe still has not found the direction of his life; he is still trying to make some sense of the larger hook he is on.

Where Gabe lets go of ties and obligations, Paul Herz, another New York Jewish intellectual of the same age as Gabe, holds on painfully to them. Paul is disowned by his parents for marrying a shiksa. Paul has never needed his parents for support and yet he feels keenly the loss of parental affection. He is also very devoted to his wife, Libby, even when he is disappointed in her. What he wants is "to lead a good life. Good in the highest sense, the oldest sense."³⁰ But however hard he may try to plan and order his life according to his principles, he is just taken in by the force and unexpectedness of circumstance. After marriage it appears to him often that he has lost control over his affairs. The bitter actualities of life, like Libby's abortion for instance, petrify his feelings. From time to time, like Gabe, Paul also thinks of an escape from duty.

At a crucial moment in his life, when his father is dying

and he has left Libby alone for the first time after their marriage, Paul feels tempted to let go of all his ties and commitments. He can easily leave his parents, his wife, his job to begin "a new life." But can he forgo his own nature? "His Paulness. His Herzness."³¹ Will he find his true self--his true identity--by giving up all that has given meaning to his life so far or will he lose it in the process? It may be that "He was Libby, was his job, was his mother and father, that all that had happened was all there was."³² And, after all, nobody cuts all ties, Paul realizes, and he, being a man of duty, cannot declare his freedom from obligations. He goes to the cemetery just as his father is being buried and rushes into the arms of his grieving, long-estranged mother. "There were several choices open to Paul that moment; it was not because all the paths of escape were blocked that, instead of moving out, he moved in. He could have run away, or simply walked away, but he moved in because in was the direction of his life."³³ This painful and yet moral choice may not, perhaps, make Paul any happier than Gabe, who is free from all obligations, but at least it gives him a sense of purpose, a sense of direction; "he saw his place in the world. Yes. And the world itself--without admiration, without pity."³⁴ After his truth is revealed to him, he feels "momentarily at rest in the center of the storm through which he had been traveling all these years."³⁵

In Letting Go, Roth does not provide simple solutions for the predicament of the intellectual in our time. It is

difficult for an individual to change himself, he being "this unalterable animal" as Stevens calls him in the last epigraph to the novel.³⁶ At the same time, all actuality being deadly earnest, life demands that a man change and adjust himself to his circumstances in order to survive in this world. Letting Go also, in the words of Stanley Cooperman, "examines the destructive aspects not merely of evangelical morality, but of freedom itself: or, rather, freedom without responsibility, which becomes moral anarchy. Lacking what Paul Herz finally comes to recognize as 'consequence,' human choice is reduced to impulse; and human beings, as Martha says to Gabe Wallach (himself incapable of commitment to anything but his own appetites) are 'jelly-filled'."³⁷ Except for Paul Herz, all other male protagonists of Roth fail to come to terms with reality, as they are reluctant to live a committed life. They shirk their responsibilities, refuse to accept their moral obligations. They remain escapist till the end. They fail to bridge the gap between the self and the society.

The failure of love ostensibly seems to be the theme of The Deer Park. Talking about the novel Mailer remarks in The Advertisements for Myself:

I was no longer telling about two nice people who fail at love because the world is too large and too cruel for them; the new O'Shaugnessy had moved me by degrees to the more painful story of

two people who are strong as well as weak,
corrupt as much as pure, and fail to grow
despite their bravery in a poor world, because
they are finally not brave enough, and so do
more damage to each other than to the unjust
world outside them.³⁸

Though Mailer imagines that the strength of the novel lies in O'Shaugnessy, one feels that the human interest in the novel is sustained more by the fallible characters like Eitel and Elena than O'Shaugnessy and Marion Faye, the bearers of Mailer's emerging philosophy of the Hip and the new consciousness. As a narrator, perhaps, O'Shaugnessy might be the strength of the novel, but as a character he is one of its weak points. As Richard Foster observes, "Sergius O'Shaugnessy is disastrously vague, and Marion Faye is flat; their central moral significance in The Deer Park is diminished to abstraction and formula by their failure to be as human as the roundly conceived moral cripples surrounding them in the populous world of Desert D'Or."³⁹ Had it not been for Mailer's weakness for imposing his views and insights on a work instead of integrating them naturally into the mainstream of its narrative, The Deer Park would have been a masterpiece. Robert Ehrlich also testifies to this view when he says that "Just as Cummings and Croft constantly speculate about the future in terms that are hastily pulled from the western philosophical tradition, Faye, Eitel, and O'Shaugnessy offer up important ideas which are not adequately explored and therefore sometimes weigh heavily upon the novel as metaphysical bloat."⁴⁰ Still, with all its obvious flaws, The Deer Park remains a great work in its rich human interest.

The scene of the novel is set in the cactus wild of Southern California in a place called Desert D'Or, which is portrayed as a favourite resort of film celebrities from Hollywood. This place "where no trees bear leaves"⁴¹ is another modern wasteland and severely points to the unnatural and hollow lives that the people there lead, a place where true love is as hard to come by as green foliage and water. Mailer has caught on to the pulse of the movie people and their world so well in this novel that it becomes more real than what Sergius O'Shaugnessy calls "the real world" and from which he hails--a world of wars and boxing clubs and children's homes on back streets--"a world where orphans burned orphans."⁴²

The novel is mainly concerned about two love affairs, one, that of Sergius with the movie goddess Lulu Meyers, and the other, that of Eitel with Elena Esposito. Like most of the Mailer heroes, Sergius O'Shaugnessy, the narrator of the story, is an orphan. Sergius, besides, had had a very traumatic experience in the war while he was fighting in Asia as an Air Force pilot and as a result of which, like Lovett of Barbary Shore, he had suffered a nervous breakdown. Sergius comes to Desert D'Or to look for a good time and also "to take the cure in the very real sun of Desert D'Or with its cactus, its mountain, and the bright green foliage of its love and its money."⁴³ Sergius nurses the secret hope of becoming a brave writer some day, but decides to have a long holiday at the resort before he is mentally fit for his work.

At Desert D'Or, Sergius gets to know a number of famous people from the film world, one of whom is the ex-director, Charles Francis Eitel. Through Eitel, whom he considers his best friend at the resort, Sergius also meets Herman Teppis, the autocratic head of Supreme Pictures. Teppis takes a fancy to Sergius as he thinks the latter is good material for a popular film. Sergius not only has the good looks of a film star, but also has an interesting past--as he is an orphan as well as a war hero--which, if turned into a movie, can exploit the sentimental side of the audience. With this in mind, Teppis invites Sergius to a big party that he is throwing to publicize his new picture. It is here that Sergius is introduced to Lulu Meyers, the heroine of the new movie, and that marks the beginning of their dream affair.

The romance between Sergius and Lulu Meyers sounds like the fantasy of an adolescent boy, who dreams of his favourite cinema star falling in love with him. It is a foregone conclusion that this affair is not going to last for long. Lulu comes from a world where name and fame and money are more important than love. In fact, love is made subservient to the business of making a film and selling it, as is clear from the way Teppis insists that Lulu fall in love with Teddy Pope, her co-star in the new movie, and marry him. The love affairs are in fact a publicity gimmick, and by their very nature are short-lived. In this cynical atmosphere, true and faithful love is treated with ridicule and suspicion.

The portrait of Lulu Meyers as a spoiled and wilful actress is successful, in fact she appears more real and round as a character than Sergius does. Lulu possesses the big ego of a movie goddess ^{who} ~~that~~ would have no other way than her own. With ^{the} ~~her~~ unpredictable whims and mysterious brains of a film star, she keeps Sergius on tenterhooks throughout their affair. "Yet I think Lulu would have had her surprises for any man. I couldn't tell from one hour to the next if we were in love or about to break up, whether we would make love or fight, do both or do nothing at all."⁴⁴ Their relationship, therefore, is fraught with uncertainty right from the beginning.

There is, however, one service that Lulu does ~~to~~ ^{for} Sergius, and that is to restore his potency which he had lost after his nerve-breaking experience in the war. The exhilarating idea of making love to a celebrity who is the heartthrob of millions in the country, perhaps, ^{it} ~~helps~~ helps Sergius to overcome his impotence. He is so carried away by his sexual vanity that "What she may have intended as a little dance was a track and field event to me, and I would snap the tape with burning lungs, knotted muscles, and mind set on the need to break a record."⁴⁵ Like most of the Mailer heroes, Sergius also worships sex and sexual prowess and has the arrogance to ask God, "Would You agree that sex is where philosophy begins?"⁴⁶ As Sergius, moreover, is made in the mould of a hipster, sexual satisfaction and proving his manliness are more important to him than establishing permanent ties. The same is true of Lulu, who hails from a

world where momentary pleasures of the flash are the norm of the day and the name of love is used only for publicity and making money. In the relationship between Lulu and Sergius, therefore, the physical element is stronger than the emotional aspect of love. Besides, for both of them personal ambition is more important than love.

It is obvious that the romance between Sergius and Lulu can continue only if he accepts the lucrative offer made by Teppis to sell his life-story to Supreme Pictures and also act in the movie based on his own life. Lulu, like Eitel, is the prisoner of her old habits and her own name and fame. She can appreciate and sympathise with people who show enough courage to turn their back upon the attractions of a career in films. At times she can also be tender and understanding--as she is to Sergius the night he is overcome with his old fear--but she cannot leave her own world of films. If Sergius wants her, he will have to become a part of the world to which she belongs. Sergius turns down Teppis' proposal, and that signals the end of the affair between him and Lulu. In no time Lulu is having an affair with another man. Sergius's decision to take the risk and try to be a brave writer rather than a famous cinema star is supposed to be a courageous choice. But, perhaps, it is not so difficult a choice as it appears, as Sergius's involvement with Lulu is not that deep and, besides, he is not the kind of man who could settle down with one woman. He loves his freedom more than anything else. Constancy in love is as difficult for Sergius as it is for Lulu Meyers.

At the heart of the novel lies the affair between Eitel and Elena which is unfolded at great length, in all its subtleties and complexities, with a rare insight. What Barbara Quart observes about Mailer generally is nowhere so pertinent as in the case of The Deer Park: "Although Norman Mailer has come under heavy feminist attack, he writes about relationships between men and women with accuracy and intimacy. The intense male need for love, nurture, adulation, approval, and support from women is everywhere evident in Mailer's work."⁴⁷ It is hard to come across a love relationship which is treated so realistically and yet sympathetically in all its nuances as Eitel's with Elena. Richard Foster also attests to the same fact when he says, "The delicate, tender persistence of Mailer's articulation of the life of their affair, its growth, flowering, deterioration, and crippled resolution, is rare and magnificent."⁴⁸ The very weaknesses and failures of Eitel and Elena make them touchingly human, and though the failure of their love is meant to be a clear proof of their lack of bravery and courage--as is indicated by Mailer's remarks quoted above--it is, after all, a failure more moving than the facile triumphs of men like Sergius, Rojack and company.

The novel mainly deals with Charles Francis Eitel, a famous film director fallen on bad days, and with his failure as an artist as well as a lover. At the beginning of his career, as a young man, Eitel had made three movies which were an artistic achievement, and which, in their turn, had facilitated his

entry into Hollywood. As time went by and he became more and more used to the comforts of wealth and fame, Eitel lost his former zeal and integrity as an artist and kept directing sloppy and commercial movies as his producers wished him to do. Still, not satisfied with what he was doing, all through these years, Eitel had played with the idea of making a good picture that would prove the artist in him. His second chance came when he lost his job at Supreme Pictures and was blacklisted as a result of his refusal to co-operate with the Subversive Committee. What looked like a misfortune, Eitel hoped, would turn out to be a blessing in disguise as it would give him ample time and opportunity to work on a script which he had had in mind for years.

However, it is not so easy to write this script and Eitel discovers that he is but ill-equipped for the lonely and long struggle of an artist's life after his stay in Hollywood. Besides, like most Mailer protagonists, Eitel is a prisoner of sex: he cannot live without women and sex. As a powerful cinema director he had had access to all kinds of famous and beautiful women and had acquired the fame of being very good in bed. Now forced to be an ascetic by circumstances, Eitel fears that he has lost his sexual prowess as well as his former appeal to women. Elena Esposito lays to rest all the fears he had on this account and brings the promise of a new life for him.

There are portions in The Deer Park, especially those

dealing with the relationship between Eitel and Elena, where one feels that Sergius is only a nominal narrator and the author has taken over. There can be little doubt that Mailer's sympathies lie with Elena Esposito, the corrupted innocent, and she is his major triumph as far as the delineation of woman characters is concerned. But even a sympathetic portrayal like that of Elena's cannot escape criticism at the hands of the feminists as is evident in what Mary Ellmann says of Elena and her marriage to Eitel:

Elena Esposito in Mailer's The Deer Park: ignorant, shy, inept, untidy, and utterly erogenous. Elena is less competent than Ruth, less calm, more exploited than exploiting. She is also more burdened by her own sexuality: she carries her talent around like an inoperable tumor, sinking helplessly under its weight into anyone's bed. A poor little good girl designed by nature to be bad. She looks around, vaguely, for legitimate exercise, she tries to be a flamenco dancer, but no one can cope with two professions. Fortunately, Mind pities Sex: the movie director Eitel marries her, out of integrity, masculine conscience.⁴⁹

Remarks like these only tell a partial truth about Elena and fail to capture the spirit and beauty that Elena possesses. On the other hand, here is a man's view of Elena's character in what Richard Foster says of her: "Elena, the soiled broad and dumb waif of petty disasters, is rich with an inner gift of instinctive warmth and natural dignity worthy of Cleopatra; she is one of the few great woman characters in American fiction after James."⁵⁰ Warm-hearted, sensitive and proud, Elena brings the promise of a new life for Eitel which he fails to avail ^{himself} of because of his own weaknesses and old habits.

As Sergius says of Eitel, like most cynics he is profoundly sentimental about sex. During his first nights with Elena, he finds her to be a worthy partner to a sexual gymnast like him: *self* "She had the lusts of a bored countess, and what had he been looking for so long, if not for that?"⁵¹ Besides, Elena is utterly unworldly and cares little for things like fame and money. She, therefore, is the right sort of a companion for an artist in his lonely battle. "The artist was always divided between his desire for power in the world and his desire for power over his work. With this girl it was impossible to thrive in the world except by his art, and for these weeks, these domestic weeks when all went well and the act of sitting beside her in the sun could give him a sense of strength and the confidence of liking himself, he would feel indifference to that world he had found so hard to leave."⁵² In the early days of their affair, Eitel feels inspired by the presence and love of a person like Elena and looks to her to give him the necessary strength and courage to prove himself as an artist, just as she had helped him to prove his potency and dispelled the fears he had had on that account.

Eitel, unfortunately, belongs very much to the world of motion pictures that he has so reluctantly left. Like most of the film celebrities, he has led a promiscuous life and considers it a disgrace to have to be faithful to one woman alone. While "the noble savage" in him is happy to have found a worthy mate who could make him brave and strong, the snob in him keeps

finding fault with her. Just as Portnoy is ashamed of X
Elena's lack of sophistication and refinement and feels
irritated at her sloppiness and messiness, the snob in him
is also nagged by the feeling that he has fallen from the
social hierarchy in his having steady relations with a woman
coming from humble origins and who, moreover, has been a
mistress of another man, Collie Munshin, and who seems to have
no other prospects than that of ending as a whore. Like most
of the male characters that we are concerned with, Eitel is
jealous of his independence and privacy and does not want to
be tied down to one woman for a lifetime. In one respect,
however, Eitel is very different from most of the Mailer
protagonists: he is full of compassion and guilt. While he
finds it hard to overcome his self-centredness, at the same
time, he is sensitive to the pain and suffering of Elena and
feels responsible for her. He, therefore, is more human than
Sergius, D.J. or Rojack and one feels thankful that Eitel does
not have to narrate his own story or have to carry the burden
of Mailer's heroic ideal.

Throughout his affair with Elena, Eitel is torn between his
love for her and his love of freedom, between his concern for
her and his self-interest. This conflict in him gets still
worse as he is once again lured by the attractions of the film
world. The temptation comes to him in the form of Collie
Munshin, Teppis' son-in-law and one of the leading producers at
Supreme Pictures. Munshin visits Eitel and leads the latter to

narrate the story of the script on which he is working. Munshin, on his part, suggests some changes which would make it commercially viable and offers to buy it when it is ready. Though Eitel realizes that he would be compromising himself as an artist, still, he cannot resist either Munshin's suggestions or his offer.

As the work on his new script progresses with amazing facility and smoothness, Eitel's dissatisfaction with Elena also grows. She appears to be a poor companion ^{for} to a famous man like him. The time has come, he thinks, to decide how he would break up with her. However, he does not want to end the affair immediately as that would be too disturbing for his work on his new script. Eitel knows too well that, with her pride, Elena would not stay a moment once she realizes that he does not love her. He, therefore, tries to manipulate her in such a way that she would not leave him till the script is finished and, at the same time, she would not be led to expect too much from their relationship. He also does his best to smother the compassion and pain that he feels for her, as these feelings would make Elena a person and not an object, "it would be no longer a fish, it would be Elena,"⁵³ and then it would become well nigh impossible for him to be rid of her.

In order to get over his feeling for Elena, Eitel, ~~first,~~ agrees with Marion Faye, the pimp, to have a date with one of his girls. The whole thing turns out to be a depressing and

disappointing experience. Then Eitel hits upon the idea that the best way to be free of Elena is to marry her, "If they didn't marry, he would remain wedded to her."⁵⁴ By marrying her, he thinks, he would appease his own conscience and sense of responsibility, and Elena too would benefit by this arrangement as she would have more respectability as former Mrs. Eitel than as Miss Esposito. One night, therefore, after a tense scene between them, he makes his proposal to Elena, making it clear to her, at the same time, that they would get married only in order to be divorced. To his surprise, Elena turns down the offer and earns Eitel's respect: "The essence of spirit, he thought to himself, was to choose the thing which did not better one's position but made it more perilous. That was why the world he knew was poor, for it insisted morality and caution were identical. He was so completely of that world, and she was not. She would stay with him until he wanted her no longer, and the thought of what would happen afterward ground his flesh with pain as real as a wound."⁵⁵ For the first time in twenty-five years Eitel finds himself weeping, weeping at his own failure and at the thought of what would happen to Elena once he leaves her.

Eitel, at last, acknowledges to himself that he does not possess the courage of the artist; at his best he is only a professional, and so it was a mistake on his part to give up his career in films. When he finishes his script, therefore, he is ready to co-operate with the Subversive Committee so that

he can return to Hollywood and his own trade. The problem now is what he should do with Elena as "she was hardly the mate for a commercial man."⁵⁶ Elena solves Eitel's dilemma by walking out on her own, as she senses that he no longer needs her. Though Eitel knows that she is going to Marion Faye and what kind of life would be waiting for her there, in his own self-interest he does not stop her. "The interplay of love and power," says Theodore L. Gross, "pervades The Deer Park itself, especially as reflected in the character of Eitel."⁵⁷ Eitel not only sacrifices his integrity as an artist but also his love for Elena in order to gain power and wealth in the world.

In the end, Elena too, like Eitel, admits defeat before the circumstances. Her affair with Eitel had already exhausted most of her energies, and living with a cynic like Marion Faye, who wants her to commit suicide, finally breaks whatever is left of her spirit. After her car accident with Marion, the girl who had turned down Eitel's offer of marriage out of self-respect and pride only a few months back, ^{she} has lost enough of her nerve to beg of him to marry her. The marriage between Eitel and Elena is supposed to be the final signature on the failure of their love and integrity. Eitel returns to his vocation of directing sloppy movies and to his promiscuous life as is shown in his affair with Lulu Meyers in the last chapter of the novel, and Elena slumps into the role of a housewife and a mother.

Though Mailer wants us to believe that The Deer Park is a tale of the failure of love, the failure in this case is not without its merits. Eitel is a prisoner of sex like other Mailerian heroes, but he has also the saving grace of his self-knowledge and ironic intelligence, ^{and} as also of his compassion and his sense of responsibility to Elena. Like Levin of A New Life, even after the transitory glow of the romantic infatuation has passed, Eitel tries to be just to the woman he had once loved, and still continues to care for ^{her}, only in a different way, as a person. He feels enough affinity with Elena so as to think that "no matter what he felt toward her, they were mates, the wound of one's flesh soothed by the wound of the other, and that was better than nothing."⁵⁸ Being able to feel concern and sympathy for another person is no mean achievement for a man living in the corrupt and cruel world of Hollywood.

The greatest triumph of this love, however, is the change in Elena and her search for identity, apart from being the wife of Eitel, the famous director, and her son's mother. Elena is one of those rare woman characters who seems to be on the way to self-actualization as is evident when she asks Eitel what she should do with her life. "He held her to him, and fondled her hair, feeling a sense of protection which bid her to stop here and ask no more; for of all the distance she had come, and he had helped her to move, and there were times like this when he felt the substance of his pride to depend upon exactly her improvement as if she were finally the only human

creation in which he had taken part, he still knew that he could help her no longer, nor could anyone else, for she had come now into that domain where her problems were everyone's problems and there were no answers and no doctors, but only that high plateau where philosophy lives with despair."⁵⁹ In the end, though the uncertainty of life pervades their relationship too, as is seen in Eitel's fear that Elena would grow away from him and perhaps leave him in the future, one still feels that in their mutual understanding, respect and concern for each other as separate persons, Eitel and Elena have come very near to agape.

Malamud has been described as a romanticist by many, as his works reveal a constant preoccupation with the theme of love and faith in love as an answer to the problem of existence. However, his is not a blind faith, and though his protagonists may have sentimental and romantic notions about love, Malamud's approach to love is unsentimental and realistic. In novel after novel he puts his characters through a painful trial by love which makes them shed their self-centred, romantic preconceptions about love and come to the realization that love actually means hard work and discipline. As Sandy Cohen observes, "This trial by love eventually forces Malamud's protagonists into an intense self-scrutiny in which they begin to realize both their past mistakes and their need to be concerned for

other people. That is, through love and suffering their basic drives transform from eros to caritas."⁶⁰

The Assistant is a tale about love, but a tale about love without the usual glamorous or romantic trappings. The setting in which it takes place is as ^{as} unromantic, as a stark and gloomy grocery store, which is variously described in the novel as "a long dark tunnel," "a prison," "a death tomb," and so on. The era in which it takes place is the dismal and heartbreaking years of ^{the 1930's} Depression. The characters are poor, and engaged in a bitter struggle for their very survival. In the words of Ihab Hassan, therefore, "The Assistant, presumably, is a love story, a domestic romance, a grocery store idyll of unwarranted poverty and harsh spiritual deprivation. It is a tale of loneliness, of lifelong frustrations and delicate budding hopes. It is a 'human' story albeit deeply ironic."⁶¹

The Assistant narrates how his love for Helen, the grocer's daughter, converts Frank Alpine, an aimless drifter, to the discipline of Jewish suffering. The man who points the way to redemption via suffering for Frank is Morris Bober, the poor grocery man. As the novel opens, it shows us an ordinary day in the life of Morris Bober with his daily routine in the store. Just to give the poor Poilisheh her roll in return for three cents, Morris gets up early in the morning at six. He gives things on credit to the poor when he has little hope of ever getting his money back from them. He welcomes and offers tea

to a fellow sufferer like Breitbart, the pedlar. In short, ^{as} Morris Bober is a man who has put the ethic of love, altruistic love, in ^{to} practice. Ironically enough, Morris' very goodness has made his life all the more difficult and miserable ~~for him~~ and brought him ^{to} on the verge of bankruptcy. But, as Sandy Cohen observes, "Morris' failure is his success. His failure in business, in the mundane world, in the American Dream, means success in the spiritual, metaphysical world."⁶²

The importance of the relationship between Frank Alpine and his spiritual or surrogate father, Morris Bober, has been pointed out by several critics. Robert Ducharme, for instance, refers to Freud's Totem and Taboo and maintains that the Freudian theme of father-son relationship is an important element in Malamud: "The role of the father as the embodiment of mature moral ideals is a recurrent motif in all the novels of Malamud."⁶³ However, Malamud does not use the Freudian concept in the literal sense, as most of his protagonists are orphans and as such are not directly related to their mentors. This also gives them the freedom to choose the right sort of father-figure, and ~~it is~~ a very vital choice as it affects the whole course of their ^{lives} life.

Frank Alpine meets his spiritual father when he goes to rob the latter of his money, ^{accompanied by} ~~along with~~ his partner in the hold-up, Ward Minogue. A series of unfortunate incidents and experiences lead Frank to take this wrong step. Like Malamud's several

other heroes, he is an orphan who has led a very hard and miserable existence and there comes a time when he hits the bottom of his disgrace. While leading this kind of life, one day, Frank is struck by a brilliant idea that he is really "an important guy" and should become a hero in crime. "At crime he would change his luck, make adventure, live like a prince."⁶⁴

This sort of American dream of being a criminal hero would have suited one of Mailer's paranoid protagonists. Frank is a total misfit for the job ^{as} he is endowed with a worrisome conscience and compassion. No sooner they are in Morris' store than Frank realizes that it has been another stupid mistake of his--perhaps the worst one--and though he has to go through the whole ordeal of the hold-up, as he cannot ditch his partner at the eleventh hour, he feels miserable to see the poor Jew being robbed of his money and hurt ^{by a blow} on the head. Later on Frank starts hanging around the store, waiting for an opportunity to expiate his crime, and his desire to help the grocer out in his weak condition is made all the more stronger when he sees Helen Bober in the store and feels drawn towards her.

Frank, first of all, helps Morris with the milk cases. Then he begs Morris to let him work in the store, but the latter refuses as the store ^{cannot} ~~is too poor to~~ support another man. Later on, Frank starts stealing milk from the grocer and takes shelter in his cellar. When Morris finds Frank in his cellar, instead of reporting him to the cops, he takes pity on him and

gives him food and shelter. Thus Frank comes to see the innate goodness of the grocer who is kind even to a stranger like himself, who had stolen things from him. Frank is attracted towards Morris' way of life as it is, though Frank is not consciously aware of it, ^{a life} very much like the one ~~that was~~ advocated by St. Francis of Assisi, Frank's ideal. St. Francis, as Frank describes him once to Sam Pearl, "gave everything away that he owned, every cent, all his clothes off his back. He enjoyed to be poor. He said poverty was a queen and he loved her like she was a beautiful woman."⁶⁵

Frank, however, falls far short of his ideal as the saint and the beast always seem to be waging war in his soul. While working for Morris he steals small sums of money from him. Also, in his loneliness, he is filled with a desire for Helen and feels exasperated at the way Ida Bober, Helen's mother, keeps them apart. Helen is constantly in his mind and he thinks of all sorts of schemes to get her into the store so that he can exchange a few words with her. Driven by his hunger, Frank compulsively spies on Helen, though it gives him more pain than pleasure to do so. "He felt greedy as he gazed, all eyes at a banquet, hungry so long as he must look. But in looking he was forcing her out of reach making her into a thing only of his seeing, her eyes reflecting his sins, rotten past, spoiled ideals, his passion poisoned by his shame."⁶⁶

The miserable life of her father has made Helen hate the

store as well as the business of grocery. She, therefore, has set her heart against marrying a grocer. She hopes to marry a professional some day. For the same reason, during the summer Helen had gone with Nat Pearl, a Jewish law student with the promise of a bright future. This magna cum laude^{student}, however, like most of Roth's protagonists was interested in sexual pleasure and not in love. After having surrendered herself to Nat Pearl, Helen was filled with self-hatred and a sense of waste. After this bitter experience "she promised herself next time it would go the other way; first mutual love, then loving, harder maybe on the nerves, but easier in memory."⁶⁷

Helen had to give up her dream of going to college in order to help her father ~~and support~~^{his} store. This sacrifice has made her a very lonely and dissatisfied person. She longs for a larger and better life and for the return of her possibilities. Like most ~~of the~~ Jews, for Helen the only way to success and other possibilities in life is education. She wants to return to college so that she can have better prospects in life. In the beginning, therefore, she takes very little interest in Frank Alpine as he is only a poor assistant working in her father's grocery and does not fit in with her American dream of success through education.

As he knows that Helen often goes to a library nearby, Frank also starts frequenting the place in the hope of getting a chance to talk to her there. One night, as Helen is returning

from the library, Frank overtakes her and suggests going for a walk in the park, which is Helen's favourite haunt. When he finds out that Helen is interested in education, he talks about his going to college in the coming fall. Nothing could have made a better impression on Helen than this, and from thereon their acquaintance grows in spite of Helen's misgivings about and distrust of the man. In her anxiety to make Frank an educated and cultured person, Helen lends him books like Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina and Crime and Punishment. Though he finds them tough ^{reading} in the beginning, in order to please Helen, Frank reads the novels.

In his overenthusiasm ^{for?} Frank tries to give expensive presents to Helen. Helen is not willing to accept the gifts, as she believes that "For gifts you pay."⁶⁸ Her acceptance of the presents would also, she feels, change their relationship and would in some way bind her to him. She, therefore, returns the things to Frank, who, ~~as expected,~~ feels greatly hurt. Finally they reach a deal ^{the bargain} among themselves that Helen would keep the volume of Shakespeare's plays and Frank would take the scarf back.

It is on this occasion that Helen reminds Frank that she is Jewish and perhaps this remark of hers leads Frank to ask Morris Bober what a Jew is. The discussion that follows between Frank and Morris has almost become an integral part of any critical analysis of the novel. To Morris' way of thinking,

one who believes in the Law is a Jew. Morris interprets the Law in the following manner, "This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes."⁶⁹ When Frank observes that the Jews suffer more than they have to, Morris replies that "If you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don't suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing."⁷⁰ When Frank asks him what he suffers for, Morris calmly says, "I suffer for you."⁷¹

Though Frank believes that the Jews are born prisoners and suffer too much, more than they have to, he does not realize that he too is like Morris and the other Jews as far as the talent for suffering is concerned. Frank has suffered a great deal in his life because of his misfortunes and mistakes, but it is Morris, like Frank's other model, St. Francis of Assisi, who teaches him by his own example that it is better to suffer for others than for one's egoistic aims and ambitions.

The person that unwittingly leads Frank on the path shown by St. Francis and Morris is Helen. In spite of her strongest doubts, Helen finds herself falling in love with Frank. She knows too well that it would be a great mistake to get involved with this strange Italian as, in the first place, he is not a Jew.

She would make her unhappy parents still unhappier if she were to marry someone like Frank. Secondly, Frank does not have formal education and the prospects like Nat Pearl, and though she dreams of his having all these things some day, it is, after all, a distant dream. For a long time, therefore, Helen is reluctant to give herself to Frank.

Though, in the beginning, Frank waits patiently for Helen to respond to his passion for her, he gets fed up with his physical loneliness as time goes by, and becomes more and more impatient. "He was the victim of the sharp edge of his hunger. So he wanted her to the point where he thought up schemes for getting her into his room and in bed. He wanted satisfaction, relief, a stake in the future."⁷² Helen refuses to sleep with Frank, saying she would have sex with him only when she was sure that she loved him. "I want to be disciplined," says she, "and you have to be too if I ask it. I ask it so I might someday love you without reservations."⁷³

Frank is so moved and fascinated by the idea of discipline and self-control that he decides to take a step in that direction by returning Morris' money that he had stolen from him and also confessing his part in the hold-up. "It made him want to set himself straight so he could build his love for Helen right, so it would stay right."⁷⁴ Though he is still not ready for the confession, he determines to act on his first resolve at least and so empties his wallet into the cash register. Ironically enough, this good act on his part leads to an unfortunate

incident by which Frank loses his credit and his job with Morris. Frank receives a phone call from Helen, saying she would meet him in the park at midnight and has got some good news to give him. Only then Frank realizes that now he has no money ~~on him~~ and that he might need some when he is out with Helen that evening. ^{Regretting} ~~According to~~ his old habit Frank takes out one buck from the register. He thinks he is only borrowing from the money he had deposited earlier, but is caught by Morris in the act and is straightway fired from the job.

After her date with Nat Pearl, which she had arranged only to appease her mother, Helen comes to the park after midnight, eager to give Frank the great news that she loves him. To her disappointment she discovers that Frank has still not arrived. Instead, she is approached by Ward Minogue, who tries to rape her. Frank comes in time to save her from Minogue, but in his hunger and desperation he himself takes her by force in spite of her entreaties to let her go. ^{Frank} ~~and~~ By this single impulsive and reckless act ^{Frank} ruins all his chances with Helen. In addition, for this beastly behaviour, he earns from her the epithet of "Dog-uncircumcised dog!"⁷⁵

Thus in the space of a single day Frank loses what he had taken great time and trouble to build and achieve, i.e., Morris' favour and the job at the store as well as Helen's love. This excruciating experience throws Frank completely back on himself and forces him to take an account of his past mistakes and

willless life. Like Roy Hobbs, Frank also realizes that he has not learnt anything from his past suffering and so will have to suffer more. While his anguish and self-scrutiny reveal to him his weaknesses, they also, at the same time, give him insight into his real nature, "that all the while he was acting like he wasn't, he was really a man of stern morality."⁷⁶

This insight into the basic goodness--and Jewishness--of his buried self helps Frank to channel his life on the way shown by Morris and St. Francis. He never attains perfection, but he keeps trying. During Morris' illness Frank gets another chance to work in the store and help the Bobers. Helen's and his own suffering make him all the more desirous to set things right again. "He would do anything she wanted, and if she wanted nothing he would do something, what he should do; and he would do it all on his own will, nobody pushing him but himself. He would do it with discipline and with love."⁷⁷

For the time being, it is almost impossible to approach Helen or do anything for her, ^{because} as what has happened between them has made her shut her heart against him and put both of them altogether in different worlds. In order to show his love for her and his repentance for his act, Frank ~~once~~ carves a rose in wood and offers it to Helen, only to discover it thrown in the garbage the next morning. All his pleas and entreaties to forgive him and his assertions that he is a changed man now, have little effect on Helen. Frank also confesses his part in

the hold-up to Morris when the latter returns to the store after his recovery. Morris, too, does not show any mercy to Frank and dismisses him from the store.

After Morris' death, Frank runs the store and takes the responsibility of supporting Helen and her mother, thereby assuming the role of Morris in the Bober family. That Frank overcomes his dependence upon the father-figure by incorporating the latter's ideals and values, is shown symbolically in the novel as Frank loses his balance and falls into Morris' grave. This act also signifies the death of Frank's egoistic self and the rebirth of his new being that, like Morris, devotes itself to the service of others in an unselfish manner.

Frank realizes that instead of giving her gifts that she did not want, the best thing he can do for Helen is to help her get the college education that she had always wanted and which had also been Morris' dream for his daughter. When Helen refuses to ~~take~~^{accept} his help for her education, Frank makes a confession to her about his part in the hold-up and thus purges himself of the last taint that had remained on his soul. Though Helen is unwilling to be directly under his obligation, Frank has the satisfaction of seeing her going back to school at night. To make this possible for her, he works at two jobs day and night and sacrifices his own comforts and health. Though he has little hope of getting Helen and is, moreover, pained to see her going with Nat Pearl, Frank does not abandon the course he has chalked out for himself. His kindness is not

restricted only to the Bobbers, but, like Morris', also includes his customers and poor persons like Breitbart.

The ending of the novel is rather ambiguous and so it leaves room for the speculation whether Frank will ultimately get Helen or not. Still, there are several indications in the novel which suggest that Frank and Helen might come together in the end. One night Helen sees Frank at the place where he works during nights, "groggy from overwork, thin, unhappy,"⁷⁸ and the realization comes upon her that he is doing all this for her sake. She admits to herself that he has not only kept her and her mother alive, but it is because of him that she is able to go to college. She now believes what Frank had often told her ^{which} and she had refused to believe, that he is now a changed man. "It was a strange thing about people--they could look the same but be different. He had been one thing, low, dirty, but because of something in himself--something she couldn't define, a memory perhaps, an ideal he might have forgotten and then remembered-- he had changed into somebody else, no longer what he had been. She should have recognized it before. What he did to me, he did wrong, she thought, but since he has changed in his heart he owes me nothing."⁷⁹ A week later Helen comes to the store and thanks Frank for all that he has been doing for her and Ida. She also wants him to know that she is still using the book of Shakespeare's plays that he had given her. The next night, Helen breaks off with Nat Pearl, the "symbol of the American Dream" as Sandy Cohen calls him.⁸⁰ All these incidents show

that most of the misunderstandings and obstacles in the way of their love have been cleared.

In the penultimate paragraph of the novel Frank sees the vision of St. Francis, who comes dancing out of the woods and turns the wooden rose that Frank had made for Helen into a real flower and offers it to Helen. "From him she took it, although it was with the love and best wishes of Frank Alpine."⁸¹ This vision also suggests that Frank's love, purged of its carnality, might be acceptable to Helen now.

In the last paragraph of the novel we see Frank removing yet another great barrier that holds him from attaining Helen. He has already accepted and put into practice the Law that he had inherited from Morris Bober--which actually is not so different from the teachings of St. Francis--and now he formally becomes a Jew. This act, which significantly takes place after Passover, also symbolizes Frank's rebirth into a spiritual and disciplined way of life. Helen had once called him "Dog--uncircumcised dog!"⁸² And the act of circumcision which precedes the conversion signals Frank's transformation from a beastly existence to "the man of stern morality"⁸³ that he potentially is.

The process of learning how to love, how to transcend the self through love and suffering for others, is the central concern of the novel. The Assistant traces Frank Alpine's

progress from self-centred pursuit of love to a selfless love which is accompanied by suffering and discipline and which extends not only to one person but also to others--to an ever-widening circle of humanity.

At one stage in A New Life Levin discovers that the romantic passion that he had felt for Pauline has now disappeared. Also, ^{that} if he commits himself to Pauline he might lose his chances of winning the election for the headship in the department. Levin, finally, decides to accept Pauline and her love by reasoning with himself in the following manner: "He had once loved Pauline and has no regrets for having loved her and 'if Pauline loving him loves; Levin with no known cause not to will love her. He would without or despite feeling. He would hold on when he wanted terribly to let go. Love had led him, he would now lead love'." ⁸⁴

While asserting that love is not a gift but a vow, Rojack in An American Dream observes, "It had always been the same, love was love, one could find it with anyone, one could find it anywhere. It was just that you could never keep it. Not unless you were ready to die for it, dear friend." ⁸⁵ Levin discovers that love may come in the form of a gift, but ultimately it is a vow and it involves a choice and decision. Most of the protagonists either equate love with instinct or libido on the

one hand, or with impulse, feeling or passion on the other, which by their very nature are transitory or ephemeral. That is why, like Lesser, they cannot sustain it long. Very few heroes, like Levin or Paul Herz, realize that love may begin as a feeling or passion but, in order to be enduring, it also requires will and discipline. In The Assistant, Frank Alpine too discovers the importance of will and discipline as far as love is concerned. "He would do anything she wanted, and if she wanted nothing he would do something, what he should do; and he would do it all on his own will, nobody pushing him but himself. He would do it with discipline and with love."⁸⁶

Love not only requires will and discipline but also calls for the sacrifice of one's possibilities or rather the illusion of possibilities. As C.G. Jung rhetorically puts it:

Love requires depth and loyalty of feeling; without them it is not love but mere caprice. True love will always commit itself and engage in lasting ties; it needs freedom only to effect its choice, not for its accomplishment. Every true and deep love is a sacrifice. The lover sacrifices all other possibilities, or rather, the illusion that such possibilities exist. If this sacrifice is not made, his illusions prevent the growth of any deep and responsible feeling, so that the very possibility of experiencing real love is denied him.⁸⁷

These remarks could also serve as an answer to those critics who feel disturbed at the fact that Levin gives up his job and career for the sake of a woman whom apparently he does not love. Lesser, on the other hand, sacrifices his love for

his book and in the process loses both. Levin, like Fidelman, sacrifices the illusion of his possibilities, mortifies and submits his ego to the discipline of love and wills its continuance: "Love had led him, he would now lead love."⁸⁸

Love may begin as a sexual passion or romance but if it is to be lasting it needs the Jewish virtue of discipline. It also requires readiness for suffering. The novels portray the conflict between the American dream of freedom, romance and personal achievement and the old Jewish values of restraint, renunciation and responsibility to others. The characters are faced with the choice between American individualism and the fast-disappearing Jewish way of life which places value on relationships. They have to decide between letting go and holding on, and both the choices involve pain and suffering. Gabe Wallach lets go of all ties and commitments, while Paul Herz holds on to them. Gabe cannot bear loneliness, but at the same time he is not willing to surrender his individuality. Lulu Meyers, Sergius and Eitel sacrifice love for the sake of the American dream, while Frank Alpine gives up the American dream of freedom and success in the world for the sake of love.

In his short story, "The Lady of the Lake," Malamud shows the conflict between love and freedom. He also suggests that love and suffering go together. Henry Levin, an American Jew, who is tired of the past--tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him,"⁸⁹ goes abroad in search of romance and new

open
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life. In Europe, he changes his name from Levin to Freeman, indicating thereby his wish to be free of his past, his Jewishness--after all, what had his Jewishness brought him but headaches, inferiorities, unhappy memories?—^{He wishes to} and live a life of freedom and new possibilities. Levin finally finds romance and love on the island of Isola del Dongo, in the person of a girl who calls herself Isabella del Dongo. Her name suggests ^{change Levin to Freeman} that she belongs to one of the most ancient and illustrious families in Italy. However, Levin is quite taken aback when the girl unexpectedly asks him if he is Jewish. Thinking that his Jewishness might perhaps stand in the way of his romance and adventure, Levin conceals his true identity from the girl. One day Isabella confesses to Levin that she is not a del Dongo, but actually belongs to a poor family. Though Levin is disappointed and put off by this revelation at the time, he ultimately returns to Isabella to tell her that he loves her and wishes to marry her. Isabella again asks him if he is Jewish and Levin again disowns his Jewishness. Isabella then suddenly unbuttons her bodice to reveal the marks of Buchenwald and says to Levin, "I can't marry you. We are Jews. My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for."⁹⁰ Thus Henry Levin's attempt to escape his Jewish heritage of suffering and loyalty to the past, ends in the loss of his love.

This story, in a way, describes the predicament of most of the heroes we are concerned with. [Men like Portnoy, Rojack, Roy Hobbs or Yakov Bok] ^{identify each Jewish, non-Jewish?} are eager to escape from the Jewish?

imprisoning influences of their past and live as free individuals. Rejection of the past, of the old ties and roots, and going in search of a new frontier in the hope of a new and better existence, are deeply rooted in the American psyche and myth. In fact, America was populated mostly by people who could not cope with the old conditions and so were on the lookout for a new and favourable environment. As Philip Slater observes:

If we gained the energetic and daring, we also gained the lion's share of the rootless, the unscrupulous, those who valued money over relationships, and those who put self-aggrandizement ahead of love and loyalty. And most of all, we gained an undue proportion of persons who, when faced with a difficult situation tended to chuck the whole thing and flee to a new environment. Escaping, evading, and avoiding are responses which lie at the base of much that is peculiarly American.⁹¹

Rojack's marriage with Deborah is a failure and so Rojack decides to break off with the past and look for love in another land. S. Levin of A New Life is another man in flight from his painful past and in quest of a new life. Levin seeks freedom, *but* what he gets at the end is responsibilities and burdens. In short, he discovers he cannot escape his Jewishness. The American dream invites one to follow the imperatives of the self. The old Jewish values insist on the moral imperative. The characters are generally caught between these conflicting values. Whichever alternative they choose, they cannot escape pain and suffering. While the concept of "a new life" may stand for the American dream of freedom from the past and the obligations

that it involves, the metaphor that stands for the circumscribing influences or limitations of Jewishness is prison. Very often the characters who try to break out of the prison of Jewishness, get caught into a prison of their own making. If Jewishness involves limitations and suffering, the denial of Jewishness also brings equal pain and misery, because suffering is a common human fate. Yakov Bok's attempt to live as a mere human being ends in his imprisonment. Henry Levin's denial of his true identity costs him his love. Portnoy's rejection of the moral imperative ends in his neurosis and despair. Since suffering is unavoidable Frank Alpine decides to suffer for the Law rather than for his own egoistic aims. He willingly gives up his freedom and ^{so} embraces Jewish suffering in the dark prison of a grocery store.

Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, considers evil to be the absence of relation and lack of direction. Most of the characters we are concerned with suffer from this evil. As in the case of Gabe Wallach or Red Valsen or Rojack, what they consider freedom amounts to lack of direction and avoidance of responsibility. In their fear of attachments, involvements and commitments, men like Gabe or Red contribute to their own alienation. Heroes like Rojack or Portnoy interpret freedom as licence to follow their own impulses and instincts. But freedom without self-control and responsibility turns destructive and preys upon the person. As in the case of Portnoy or Lesser

it ends into destructive obsessions. Frank Alpine starts as a drifter, but by accepting the law and the discipline it involves, he ends his beastly existence, the existence of an uncircumscribed dog, and becomes a man of morality.

In Letting Go, Paul Herz is faced with an unhappy marriage, and like Rojack of An American Dream, he too feels like letting go of his old ties and making a fresh start. And he discovers that nothing could be as easy as beginning a new life. Still, like Isabella del Dongo of "The Lady of the Lake," Paul refuses to give up the past because it is meaningful to him and, moreover, it gives him his sense of identity. For him, personal relationships are more important than success in the world. Paul rejects the American dream of personal freedom and happiness and defines his identity as a man of duty, as a Jew. The few heroes--the ones like Paul Herz, Frank Alpine, Yakov Bok or Levin of A New Life--who solve the problem of identity in a satisfying manner, do it in the Jewish framework by accepting their relation and obligation to the woman and the tribe. The protagonists that pursue the American dream generally fail in their quest for identity.

Though Roth, Mailer and Malamud happen to be Jewish, and though for the sake of convenience we have often lumped them together, there are, of course, sharp differences that distinguish them from one another. Mailer scrupulously avoids Jewish themes and characters. He is mainly concerned with the

critique of American values and the obscene version of the American dream. Roth's characters, particularly his male protagonists, are Jewish in a majority of cases. Roth portrays the conflict between the Jewish family structure and American individualism. Malamud, on his part, in novel after novel, points out the necessity of following the old Jewish values like suffering, discipline, acceptance of one's limitations and one's responsibility to others.

Feminists generally attribute the delineation of woman as destructive to the patriarchal bias of these writers. However, Malamud, who is often described as the most Jewish of the group, draws women in a most sympathetic manner. This goes to show that there are other factors, besides the patriarchal prejudice against women, which contribute to the unflattering portrayal of woman in their works. One such factor is the unresolved conflict between the American dream of personal happiness and achievement on the one hand and the old Jewish values with their insistence on the moral imperative and responsibility to others on the other. This conflict is found in its most severe form in the novels of Roth and for this reason perhaps his woman figures are most unsatisfactory.

As said earlier it appears that the image of woman also depends, a great deal, on whether a novelist subscribes more to the theme of sex or to the theme of love in his work. Novels in which the theme of sex is more predominant, tend to portray

woman as a monster, a caricature. Sex and cynicism go hand in hand. This can be easily seen in the works of Roth and Mailer with their preoccupation with sex. In Malamud the theme of love is often predominant, and as love cannot dispense with personalities, his women, in most cases, emerge as human figures. The unflattering portrayal of woman thus reflects the devaluation of love and personal relationships in the modern industrialized world.

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